

To: Senator Dorgan  
From Brittany Gipp  
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Subject: Suicide Testimony 5-2-05

I wish to testify on the suicide issue on Standing Rock.

I am a youth on the Standing Rock Reservation and I have been subjected to seeing my generation slowly fade out do to suicides. So far, I have lost 10 friends and relatives to suicide. This is only a very small amount of people who died from suicides on the reservation. Every district in our county has lost few or more people to suicide.

It's very sad to wake up to the news of someone you know or don't know that has committed suicide. I do not know the statistics of suicides on the reservation but I know there have been a huge amount. It feels like, a chain reaction goes on every time a suicide happens. You know how domino's work? That's how I feel about suicides on the reservation. Once somebody takes his or her life, you know someone else is sure to follow. The first suicide I remember was when I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and I am graduating from high school this year. That's how long I have known about suicide.

Our youth today are frequently being told not to commit suicide and that there's help for them, that there are people to talk to. The truth is there really isn't anybody or anywhere you can turn to, to receive help and guidance.

I believe that some of the reason's why our youth are committing suicide is because there is nothing you can really do actively. You can hang out with friends, but even young children are doing drugs and drinking alcohol. You can ride a bike if you have one. There is a fitness center provided by the Diabetes Program. There are different broken down basketball courts you can play at. The young children's playground equipment is run

down, broke, or is vandalized. People used to have fun, fishing and swimming at the river but now we can't even do that because the water level is too low. Most families can't afford nice things or to be able to go places without worrying about money issues. Every place that has something to do is an hour or so away.

On the reservation we the people in the community have to face hardships every day with drugs or alcohol. It seems every weekend our youth are drinking. Some as young as 11 years old are drinking and doing drugs. D. U. I. 's are not taken very seriously; you practically get a slap on the wrist. Same thing goes for drugs. The youth on Standing Rock also face child abuse or neglect from parents drinking or doing drugs. Then that reflects on the children and how they react to such things, most of the time it's negative. Even if you or anybody in this room could see how our youth's lives are you would be sad to see it. We are almost like a third world country trying to survive on our own but keep getting pushed down or stepped on everyday.

Mr. Senator I wish to ask you for help and guidance. Even if it were to address this issue over and over again it would help. Maybe, to even come to the reservation and speak to our communities about suicide would help. Or help our schools get more involved in our lives that would make a difference. There are many ways to provide solutions to suicide problems but up until this year, have we as a community been able to address this issue on a normal basis. I know money is an issue on funds for police and youth programs on our reservation. But you now know there are people who care about what happens to our youth and that they want to help the community recover from our losses. For we grieve everyday and wish for a new beginning. It is very hard to see our people walking such rough and narrow roads in their life times, but they do not have to be so short. What I am asking you and everyone listening is to help fund our programs. Thank you for your time. Brittany